

Cattlemen's Day takes a look ahead

Written by Gothenburg Times
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The Cattlemen's Day on Friday, Feb. 14, at the Gudmundsen Sandhills Lab near Whitman will focus on the future. After the flash drought of 2012, then record beef prices in 2013, what will 2014 bring?

For pastures, rangeland health can suffer after a drought. Jerry Volesky, UNL range and forage specialist, will outline the effects of the 2012 drought on pastures and make recommendations for the 2014 growing season.

Remember the massive amount of annual sunflowers last summer? Volesky will also cover what weeds should be controlled on the range and which weeds are just a natural part of the drought cycle.

The markets continued to surprise everyone last year with record high cattle prices, declining grain and forage prices, and record wholesale and retail beef prices. As drought conditions improved, herd liquidation began to stabilize.

Kathleen Brooks, UNL Extension livestock marketing specialist, will provide market outlooks for 2014. Where are fresh meat prices, supply and exports, pasture conditions, corn prices and calf prices expected to trend? Many herds are beginning to rebuild as the drought lessens and pasture conditions improve.

Brooks has tools available to calculate the cost of buying a heifer versus raising a heifer, as well as a "whole herd" calculator. Brooks warns "producers can expand too quickly, and this can actually set them back."

Believe it or not, bred heifers are bringing a good chunk of change at livestock barns across Nebraska. Cow-calf producers should consider what to do with weaned heifers. Rick Funston, UNL Extension beef reproductive specialist, will focus on economical heifer development systems.

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Kelly Bruns, the new UNL West Central Research and Extension Center associate director who has extensive experience in growth physiology will be discussing current and future technologies available to the beef producer.

In the past, raising high quality beef may have been enough for cattlemen to stand behind their product. Now, with social media, many ranchers are entering this new age as advocates for the beef industry. A panel of producers will share their successes spreading the word about their roles in beef production.

There will also be an industry trade show. Contact Rick Funston at rfunston2@unl.edu or call 308-696-6703 for a booth (cost \$50). Pre-register for the sponsored meal, by Friday, Feb. 7, to the Central Sandhills Extension Office (800-657-2113 or 308-645-2267) or Ellen at 308-696-6701.

The Gudmundsen Sandhills Lab is located 3 miles north of Whitman, then 5 miles east. The Wagonhammer Building is the building to the east. Registration begins at 8:30 a.m. MT, with the program beginning at 9 a.m.